

Motorola, Intel see FirstNet's final RFP as major milestone

Fierce Wireless Tech By Monica Allevan

January 19, 2016

From Motorola Solutions to Intel, company executives have been busy perusing the hefty Request for Proposals (RFP) that the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) released last week for the deployment of a dedicated broadband network for public safety.

The document, which includes more than 50 sections, was the subject of a webinar on Friday. Proposals to the RFP are due April 29, with questions and capability statements due Feb. 12 and March 17, respectively.

AT&T ([NYSE: T](#)) is among those that have expressed an interest in the project and has said it plans to aggressively pursue it. Systems integrators and other unknown potential bidders also are expected to participate.

Intel Security, a division of Intel, hopes to be part of the process. Patrick Flynn, director of National and Homeland Security Programs for Intel Security, has been working with FirstNet representatives for a few years now and said he's proud of the work they have accomplished. Even though it took a long time to reach this point, the hard work really begins now with the actual physical acquisition.

Security is a primary concern and Flynn identified nearly a dozen bullet points where security comes into play. Public safety users, for example, expect their communications and data to be secure from end to end, and FirstNet says the public safety broadband network's cybersecurity solution should encrypt user plane and signaling communications "everywhere possible."

Anna Gomez, a partner at Wiley Rein LLP in Washington, D.C., whose clients include wireless carriers and vendors, formerly worked as deputy assistant secretary for Communications and Information at NTIA and was involved in FirstNet efforts before it was formally created and known as FirstNet.

Gomez said she was under the impression it would take longer for FirstNet to get to a final award due to the possibility of states opting to deploy their own radio access network. "I thought that would require some kind of renegotiation with the bidders," she said. Turns out, FirstNet now estimates a final award will come by November of this year.

"I think the states are going to have to take a really hard look at whether they want to go ahead," she told *FierceWirelessTech*, in part because the way the statute was written and the way FirstNet has implemented it creates disincentives for state participation. A state needs to go through a lengthy process to get authorized to deploy its own network, at the end of which, if it doesn't get the various steps of approval at the FCC and NTIA, then FirstNet still can go forward with its own deployment.

And as lengthy as the process is, the timetable is very short for the states. Each state has 90 days to decide whether it wants to opt out, and then it will have only 180 days to submit its own RFP. (It took FirstNet at least two years to complete an RFP.) And states that want to opt out still need to get the blessing of the FCC and NTIA.

That said, a state may be inspired to opt out if it wants greater control of its network – although a state can't deploy the core; it still has to operate as part of FirstNet. However, opting out would give a state its own timetable and if it has the resources, it might want to get it done more quickly on its own.

Naturally, companies with a history in the public safety network business were happy to see the final RFP. Motorola Solutions said it will closely study the documents. "The RFP is the culmination of an important process that brings the reality of a nationwide broadband network dedicated to first responders that much closer," the company said in a statement. "We support the ongoing process to build the network and look forward to seeing its benefits for our customers nationwide."

"The release of the FirstNet RFP is an important milestone on the journey to creating a nationwide public safety network," said Dana Mehnert, Harris' senior vice president and chief Global Business Development Officer. "Harris has a long history of success in supporting public safety professionals with innovative network and communications technologies for mission critical customers. Harris applauds the government's commitment to bringing the FirstNet program to fruition and will continue to support FirstNet as it moves from concept to reality."

Gomez said Tier 1 wireless operators certainly are likely bidders, but they're going to have to partner with others to present a comprehensive bid, and they will need to cover any rural areas where they're currently lacking. FirstNet also foresees the need for satellites to cover less populated areas. Any Tier 1 carrier that bids will need "to have the capacity to manage a massive effort on a nationwide basis," she said. Aggregators and vendors also are expected to be part of the bidding process.

Getting a nationwide network in place so that emergency response workers can communicate during disasters has been a goal since at least the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

In sum: "This is a major milestone and ultimately, the country wins," Intel's Flynn said.

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